

What we learned about teaching EL students while in China:

A practical approach to reaching English Learners

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Abstract

We are two American university professors who taught a classroom of native Mandarin speaking English learners for two weeks in China. These students were pre-service teachers who self-identified as having intermediate and high proficiency levels of English. Using strategies we also teach our American pre-service teachers to use with their English learners, we provided a sheltered classroom in which to teach our Chinese students content, while nurturing their developing English. We used visuals, journaling, daily PowerPoints with sentence stems and visual symbols, group discussions, Readers Theater, whole group sharing, choral response, digital translation tools, and group messaging to provide our students with multiple daily reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities to practice and improve their English, while learning the content to help them develop as emerging teachers.

What we learned about teaching ELL students while in China:

A practical approach to reaching English Learners

As part of a five-year agreement with Huaiyan Normal University in Mainland China, we spent two weeks teaching pedagogy content to preservice teachers, all of whom are native Mandarin speakers, in a sheltered classroom. As teacher preparation professors, we teach our own teaching candidates a variety of strategies to use with their English learners (EL), including differentiation strategies that are supported by research and best practice. We were able to put our theory into practice as we faced a class of 39 ELs who self-reported as between intermediate and high proficiency with spoken and written English. To help our colleagues, many of whom encounter EL students in their everyday classes, we share here some of the most successful and replicable strategies we employed.

Sheltered instruction provides an environment for ELs in which they receive scaffolding from their teacher as they learn both content knowledge and English (Krashen, 1982; Herrera & Murray, 2011; Ariza & Coady, 2018; Seidlitz, 2019). ELs in a sheltered classroom are provided context clues and support from their teacher, who activates and builds their background knowledge to make a bridge from the known to the unknown (Seidlitz, 2019). Seidlitz describes a sheltered classroom as “a refuge from the linguistic demands of the typical mainstream classroom” (p. 7).

A sheltered classroom provides scaffolding for ELs. Seidlitz (2019) states, “In the context of language development, scaffolding provides specific targeted support so that students gradually become self-sufficient in their language production” (p. 40). Teachers can provide oral scaffolding through modeling and rephrasing. Procedural scaffolding moves from whole group, to small group, to individual work, and instructional scaffolding provides students with sentence

stems, think-alouds, and graphic organizers. In the beginning, teachers give heavy support, then less and less support as the learner becomes more independent. Pearson and Gallagher (1983) refer to this phenomenon as gradual release of responsibility, and they coined the terms, “I do, we do, you do.” First the teacher models, as in a write-aloud, then teacher and students do a task together, as in shared writing, then the students work individually, as in independent writing.

As we planned instruction for our students at Huaiyan Normal University, we tried to replicate a sheltered instruction classroom. We scaffolded our students through PowerPoints, learning journals, Readers Theater, digital translation tools, group texting application, and choral response while they learned content and simultaneously developed formal and informal language. In this manuscript, we will discuss some of the procedures we put into place to make content comprehensible for our students.

PowerPoint

A seemingly ubiquitous tool used throughout the world in educational settings, PowerPoint has been the topic of numerous oral and written discussions. Using the search terms “PowerPoint” and “teaching” our university library’s digital database returned 103,703 results dated between 2010-2020. While there is some disagreement about the effectiveness of using a digital slide program during lectures and other classroom activities (Gordani & Khajavi, 2020), there seems to also be the view that these tools will continue to be used in classrooms around the globe (Oomman, 2012). Because of this latter reality, much of the available literature, however, focuses on helping improve the manner in which digital slide shows are used (e.g., Kundart, 2014; McLeod et al., 2013; Wanner, 2015). It seems that authors have adopted a fatalistic attitude toward digital slide software and are focusing on effective use instead.

When planning our daily lessons, primarily in the content of literacy, we considered a variety of delivery tools. Because PowerPoint software is available on all classroom computers at HNU and is available on all of our university computers, SHSU faculty find it convenient to use this tool to supplement lectures and presentations while teaching in China. Because we were deeply invested in assisting our EL students in both class content and English language fluency, we established and implemented the following five procedural norms in our presentations whenever practicable.

1. Include all questions in the slides

According to Seidlitz (2019), teachers must provide comprehensible input for ELs to give them a context in which they can understand messages in English. Krashen (1982) stated that ELs should receive input that is challenging enough for learning to occur. If the input is too difficult or not challenging enough, the learner will not grow in second language development. Students must receive input that supports and engages them and provides a bridge from the known to the unknown. An important aspect of learning is engaging with questions to consider specific content, situations, applications, etc. To ensure that all students are able to understand, interpret, and respond to all questions posed during the lesson, all questions that are asked throughout the lesson, large and small, are written into the PowerPoint slides. Included in this practice are both open-ended and closed-ended questions, which gives the students the opportunity to process questions in both written and verbal forms. This allows students who need to translate vocabulary and concepts the opportunity to do so in real time, helping to keep them engaged.

Students are, of course, given wait time to allow them to listen to the question, read the question, and, if necessary, translate the question into their first language, which eliminates the

stress-inducing need to understand the entire prompt when it is stated orally only once. Students discuss the questions with their shoulder partners or groups and work together to understand the content. Finally, students are able to respond to the question, either in written or oral form, or both, depending on what is asked of them. Seidlitz (2019) states, “When ELs have low-stress opportunities to talk and write, they are able to practice new language structures and notice gaps in their existing language knowledge” (p. 33). ELs should have many times throughout the day for short conversations with peers combined with writing to practice language, negotiate meaning, and reflect on their language learning.

2. All directions and instructions in the slides

A common and effective practice used with EL students is to provide information in multiple modalities (Kaplan, 2019). Seidlitz (2019) emphasizes the importance of providing ELs many opportunities throughout the day to read, write, listen, and speak in English. Allowing students to not only hear directions, but to also read, discuss, and write the instructions, further supports positive language acquisition across modalities. Throughout the two weeks of day-long lessons, we used a variety of teaching methods to provide stimulation and motivation and encourage the students to maintain focus and engagement. One critical component to the success of each activity and assignment was to provide all instructions both verbally and written into the PowerPoint presentation. This acts to give students visual support to the oral language they experience, and again allows them to listen to, read, discuss, and translate instructions when necessary, allowing for greater success in understanding the assigned task and subsequently greater success in completing the task.

3. Visual cue to prompt written response

According to Wong, et al. (2018), the most effective PowerPoint slides include an image or graphic to help the instructor make a point. Images that reinforce instructions such as where to place completed assignments, when to line up for recess, and how to take care of materials will give students of all backgrounds a clearer understanding of what is expected of them. Based on this advice, while preparing our slides for daily instruction, we added a clipart image of a pencil into every slide that asked for a written response. This helped the students understand that when they saw the pencil image, there was something they would be writing or drawing. This reduced the number of students who failed to complete a task due to having missed or misunderstood the directions.

In addition to using visual prompts for written response, we also provided many other visuals on the PowerPoint to help students understand the content. Seidlitz (2019) emphasizes, “Incorporating visuals in our lessons dramatically increases student ability to understand class lessons and discussions” (p. 63). Teachers can use posters, maps, videos, photos, pictures, graphic organizers, and real objects to connect to students’ background knowledge or to help build their background knowledge. In one lesson about the semantic, graphophonic, and syntactic cueing systems, the students were having trouble understanding what a “cue” was, and we decided to reteach the next day.

Because we had repeatedly seen pictures, stuffed animals, and figurines of the Pink Panther in various shops and on signs in China, we decided to find a clip art of the Pink Panther holding a magnifying glass and looking for clues to include in the lesson’s PowerPoint. We explained to the students that “cues” were like “clues,” and when somebody reads, they use visual or picture clues, meaning clues, and structure clues to figure out the words. We also made

a big magnifying glass cut-out and posted it on the wall. We wrote the words “clues,” “visual or picture,” “meaning,” and “structure” on cards, and posted them next to the magnifying glass. Then we asked the students how to say “clue” in Mandarin, and they taunted us, bursting into giggles when we had difficulty with the pronunciation. Once the students understood the concept of readers looking for clues as they read, we re-introduced the academic language, “cues,” “graphophonic,” “semantic,” and “syntactic.” They were then able to understand the new vocabulary since they possessed new background knowledge to bridge between the known and the unknown.

4. Presentations available to students digitally

As with the use of PowerPoint presentations as a teaching tool in general, there is also disagreement about the practice of providing the students with copies of the slides either before or after the lecture (Gordani & Khajavi, 2020). Within the context of teaching native Mandarin speaking students in an English-only class, we decided to make our presentations digitally available to students before, during, and after the lectures. This allowed students to review information in their own time and space, alleviating the stress of missing information, questions, directions, and assignments. Before each class, a digital copy of the presentation slides was sent to the students, who had permission to read through them, print them, or access them digitally for taking notes. Many students took time to look ahead to see what fun activities we had planned, which increased motivation and engagement.

It has been argued that students who are given lecture slides before the lecture are less likely to engage with the content during the lecture (Gordani & Khajavi, 2020). To avoid this passive attitude, we followed the advice of Wong et al. (2018) and used minimum words in our presentations, which acted to emphasize, punctuate, and support instruction rather than replace

instruction. Students were still required to engage with the content presentation in order to learn and understand. This practice also aided student-to-student tutoring or reteaching in case of absence or misunderstanding.

5. Embedded content and sources

The final established practice we used regarding PowerPoint presentations to assist our EL students was to include, in the notes section of each slide, materials and references associated with the content. Because the students would have access to a digital copy of the presentation, adding source material, extension material, background information, etc., was helpful to students who were new to the content and learning in a foreign language. This eliminated the need to stop lectures for remediation or due to lack of basic content knowledge, because students could individually explore auxiliary materials as necessary. Throughout the course, we embedded documents, links, sources, and other information into our presentations.

Although scholars may never agree on the effectiveness of any single digital teaching tool, the easy access to Microsoft PowerPoint made for a convenient shared program between the professors from SHSU and the students at HNU. Using standard, pre-established, and pre-taught strategies, we were able to assist our EL students in successful content knowledge attainment as well as in gaining fluency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English.

Learning Journals

The second strategy that we used in our classes in China to support our ELs was learning journals. One of the authors uses learning journals in most of her SHSU courses, so it was a natural fit to transfer this practice to her international teaching. Based on Stevens and Cooper's (2009) text, students keep journals with a variety of entry types including lists, narratives, short answers, sketches, etc. Although the text also includes suggestions on grading journal entries, the

authors used the learning journals in this context without credit, scores, grades, or points attached. This was in part due to time constraints in a two week period with 7 hours of instruction per day. It also, however, allowed students the freedom to explore their own possibilities within the blank pages and define success for themselves regarding note taking, sketching, and answering questions.

1. Every student answers every question

Although no scores were given for use of the learning journal, the highly-motivated students were expected to actively participate in the use of the journals. Indeed, following the advice of Rogers (2013), we employed the practice of expecting every student to respond in their learning journal to every question or prompt on the PowerPoint slides when the pencil image, discussed above, was present. This expectation required all students to engage with every aspect of the content at critical places in the lessons. To monitor participation, we circulated throughout the classroom while the students wrote or sketched their responses. This allowed us to further encourage participation as well as be readily available to offer suggestions and guidance or ask for clarification or explanations.

2. Visual cue to prompt oral sharing

While circulating the classroom during response time, instructors also took the opportunity to look for responses to be shared by the students with the rest of class. Because our students lacked confidence in their spoken English fluency, we used stickers placed beside the relevant journal response to indicate that a student would be asked to share their response orally with the class. This practice, a modification of a strategy suggested by Colombo (2012), gave students the opportunity to prepare their verbal responses, practicing silently or quietly while their peers continued to write, increasing their confidence and fluency while vocalizing in class.

Incidentally, rather than only asking students to share correct answers, we often asked students to share answers that gave an opinion, illustrated a common error, or might spark a deeper discussion between peers. This helped students understand that there is often more than one way of looking at the content.

Seidlitz (2019) suggests a similar format that we used, called ‘numbered heads together’, in which students in a group number off. Next they are given a sentence stem, and think about and write down how they will complete the stem. Group members then take turns giving the answer using the stem in order of their numbers. The teacher will choose someone to share out from each group by calling out a number and having students stand and complete the stem if they have that number. Groups are often given the choice of coming up with a group response. This gives students time to rehearse their response within the safety of a small group. For students who are less proficient with English, their peers can help them read and practice the answer. In addition, each student has the opportunity to read, write, listen, and speak while hearing their peers’ ideas as they speak in complete sentences. Students are all accountable because they do not know who will be called on to share, but they are also supported by their group members.

3. Two-way communication and feedback

Another benefit of using learning journals in an EL classroom is the opportunity for two-way communication between the instructor and individual students. While it may have been unrealistic for us to review every student’s journal at the end of every school day, we were able to navigate in-class opportunities to review several journals throughout the day. For example, while one of us was engaged in direct instruction, the other would be actively monitoring the room, offering assistance if needed. More often, however, this provided an opportunity to informally peruse individual students’ journals, asking questions, providing feedback, offering

suggestions, etc. Opportunities for this informal practice were also found during individual work, group work, and creativity time.

In response, students were able to use their journals for individual questions, statements, and suggestions without the discomfort and fear that are often associated with oral participation in a non-native language. This was particularly important as we, being new to teaching in a Chinese university classroom, learned to navigate cultural expectations of behavior for professors. For example, the students let us know that professors usually are not seen to sit on tables, desks, or counters; talk about religious topics in any context; or wear athletic shoes to class. While the students were learning English, we were learning Chinese academic protocols through comments in the students' journals.

4. Trackable Progress: Content and Language

Finally, the use of a learning journal allowed both the student and teacher to track students' progress on both the acquisition of language and the growth in content knowledge. At the end of the first week of classes, we asked the students to review their journal entries from the first day of class, just four days prior. Students commented that they were surprised at how much longer their answers were at the end of the week, stating, 'I was more shy with words,' and 'It took more thinking before I write.' Although their fifth-day entries contained similar syntax errors as their first-day entries, the entries became longer and more robust. Students also attempted the use of academic language more frequently at the end of the first week, evidence of more confidence and fluency with written English, as suggested by Stevens and Cooper (2009).

In today's culture of increasingly prevalent digital tools in the classroom, we found that returning to paper and pencil responses helped our EL students make strides with their use of academic English language. By integrating the use of the journal into all four areas of English

proficiency – reading, writing, speaking, and listening, students saw gains in all areas of English competency, and simultaneously increased their English language confidence.

Readers Theater

Because our instructional goals with our university students included several English language acquisition skills as well as content skills, we chose to use Readers Theater, even though most research in this area is focused on elementary students. Readers Theater is a strategy for teaching and learning reading that was developed to assist young students with fluency through the rehearsal and performance of a script (the target text) to an audience (Young, et al., 2019). Additional research, however, indicates readers also improve in the areas of vocabulary building and comprehension (Young, et al., 2017).

One of the primary benefits of Readers Theater is the implementation of repeated reading (Paige, 2011), which can increase fluency and improve cadence in oral reading as well as support pronunciation and enunciation. At the university level, we decided to scaffold the reading scripts from short, familiar material, to more complicated and involved texts that the students had to study and understand.

1. Reading Written Responses

The first type of Readers Theater employed was having our students fluently read from their journal responses. While not strictly adhering to the Readers Theater scripting format, students were asked to practice and read their journal entries for fluency and meaningful intonation. Using the visual cue for sharing aloud, the instructors began asking students to stand at their desk and read short, simple responses. After the first two days, however, we began asking students to stand at the front of the room and fluently read longer passages, being sure to give the students adequate time to practice their reading. Students would often ask their peers for help

with pronunciation and would quietly practice their reading before being asked to share with the class. This facilitated increased confidence and reduced the incidence of embarrassment and shame associated with making verbal errors.

2. Short, English Only

To start the second week of instruction, a formal introduction to the logistics of the Readers Theater concepts prepared students to spend their time and energy writing, practicing, and performing scripts in the classroom. We continued to require oral sharing of journal responses, but also began using short, English only texts as scripts. These selections included children's poems and other short passages that often included rhyme and meter, raising the interest and challenge for our students. Students were encouraged to write out the passage in script/screenplay format, to become familiar with the mechanics of using a script, which was important for the final stage of our implementation of Readers Theater.

3. Longer, Dual Language

Finally, we introduced longer dual language selections that were based in traditional Chinese folklore. The source material were children's books, written and illustrated by Li Jian in both Chinese and English, that related the stories of characters in the Chinese Zodiac. Titles included *The Little Monkey King's Journey* (Jian, 2012a) and *The Water Dragon* (Jian, 2012b). Students were encouraged to build complex scripts and include, if desired, props and costumes. Finally, students were asked to read the text during their performance to stay true to the Readers Theater construct. This allowed them to focus on the delivery of lines rather than on the memorization of text, which is supported by the research on Readers Theater (Coombs & Young, 2014).

Although we used narrative texts to introduce the format of Readers Theater to our Chinese-speaking university students, expository text can be used as well. Indeed, using Readers Theater with complex informational text can increase student understanding of concepts and assist in content-specific vocabulary acquisition (Holloway, 2014; Wulandari & Narmaditya, 2017). Similarly, Coombs and Young (2014) propose that students present critical analyses and research findings in the form of Readers Theater, which increases motivation and engagement for both presenter and audience.

Digital Translation Tools

Translation between English and any other language for use in the classroom used to be incredibly difficult and time consuming. Either a professional bilingual translator was needed, or teachers themselves had to plod through the laborious task of attempting to translate passages word for word, which did not always produce syntactically accurate written or oral messages for the student. This led to increasingly complicated and confusing classes as EL students fell further behind and risked being alienated and left behind all together. EL students who did nothing to indicate they did not understand could be easily overlooked, while students who attempted to bring attention to their situation may have been subjected to disciplinary actions or misdiagnosed as learning disabled if the teacher did not understand the student's message.

Because our Chinese university students had been taught English as a foreign language in China, rather than in an English speaking context where learning the language was enhanced through immersive engagement outside of the classroom, they lacked some fluency in their English language skills. First, they had very little exposure to academic language specific to pedagogy content, oral or written. Most pedagogical terminology was not in the students' verbal or sight vocabulary, making it difficult to have even general conversations about educational

topics. Second, the students had learned much of their pronunciation from instructors who also spoke primarily Mandarin Chinese, which led to variations in pronunciations and increased difficulties in communication with us, their native English speaking professors, each of whom has a different regional accent and both of whom spoke faster than students could mentally process or translate.

Rather than attempt to either hire a translator or complete our own tortured translations, we opted to use modern technology to our advantage. Or rather, we asked the students to take advantage of modern technology: digital translation applications. These programs, some of which are available at no cost to the student, are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the ability to translate to syntactically accurate text in the target language. Students were encouraged to use these applications when necessary to help them better understand content, questions, directions, etc. (Note: Google Translate is not available in mainland China as of the writing of this manuscript. Alternative applications such as My Language and Microsoft Translator, however, were easily available for no cost.)

1. Access to Devices

Today, we are fortunate to have powerful technology that is becoming increasingly available even in remote areas and by underprivileged populations. Many of our students come to school with smartphones, tablets, laptops and other digital devices that allow them access to more information than they could ever hope to need (Jalil & Sabir, 2019). Additionally, many public school districts are able to provide Internet capable devices to all students, which narrows the digital divide and provides access for students who would otherwise be left behind. For districts that need financial assistance, many granting agencies are able to provide funding to assist in arming all students with modern technology.

With increased access to devices, however, we must also acknowledge that the digital divide goes further than just access to computers and includes concerns such as Internet connectivity, digital literacy, and digital safety and security issues (Stowe, 2020). Access to Internet connections for students from low income families or in communities with scarce public WiFi may effectively negate the intent of arming all students with computers. Connectivity disparities became exponentially evident in the wake of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, when many public school districts in the United States realized they needed to facilitate Internet access by providing scheduled hotspots for students who do not have access to Internet services at home. Buses and other vehicles were sent to park in designated areas and offer wireless access to students in the vicinity, offering a temporary solution to an on-going problem.

In our context with university students in China, all students had access to at least one portable Internet-enabled device. Most had a smartphone as well either a laptop computer or digital tablet. Additionally, our students were conscientious about carrying charging cords and battery banks to facilitate uninterrupted use of these tools. Regarding the digital divide, the HNU students in our class were adept at using sophisticated applications, navigating wireless Internet connection, and troubleshooting technology issues for themselves and their peers.

2. Continuous Monitoring

As with all innovations in the classroom, however, it is necessary to monitor use of digital devices by students. Classroom teachers must be diligent in watching for students who are using their devices for off-task behavior, such as watching videos, shopping, and playing games. Because our students were university students and were in an elite program with a rigorous application process, we hoped not to have to deal with such matters. But as all students are prone to do when asked to engage in the classroom for an entire day, our students often found

themselves in need of redirection (Aaron & Lipton, 2018). We moved about the room frequently throughout our lessons, especially when students were engaged in individual tasks, to ensure students were on task and redirected them whenever necessary.

Classroom instructors may forever debate the place of digital devices in the classroom, categorizing them as friend or foe depending on if, how, and when the devices are employed in academic endeavors. For our purposes, we were able to take advantage of the students' personal devices and turn them into allies in our quest to improve the students' English proficiency along with their content knowledge.

Group Texting Application

Although the proverbial jury is still out on the legality, morality, and logistical issues of individual teachers communicating with their students via digital texting applications (Rubin, 2020), a text-based application (app) can be an efficient and timely tool that allows nearly real-time conversations between teacher and students. When the need arises to communicate with several students at once, in our case 39 students and 2 instructors, it becomes desirable to use an app that allows for everyone to have access to the conversation and information at the same time. We looked at several group text-messaging apps that we had used before to decide what would be appropriate for our use in China. Because of the popularity of the app WeChat in Chinese culture, paired with the easy access to this app globally [at the time this manuscript was submitted (Shu, 2020)], we chose to communicate via group chat in the WeChat app.

1. Teacher to Student Communication

There were several opportunities, both while in class and outside of class time, when we as professors felt we needed to communicate with our students in a way that could not be accomplished verbally or on the projected presentation. In class, we used WeChat to send

directions, explanations, and reading selections in the form of messages, PDF, Word documents, and Internet links, directly to the students. This allowed students to have necessary information in a format that was portable and manipulatable, facilitating the ability for them to review material after the lesson had moved forward. Students were also able to communicate with one another regarding materials we sent, allowing them to collaborate on clearer understanding of the material.

Outside of class time, we sent our students a variety of messages including reading assignments, documents, assignment directions, images, Internet links, and reminders about upcoming activities, assignments, due dates, and events. If we needed students to bring special supplies to class such as art supplies or science materials, WeChat facilitated efficient communication to all students. WeChat also facilitated allowing students access to reading material without necessitating either students or instructors make printed copies, reducing costs and our carbon footprint.

We found WeChat to be advantageous over traditional email communication for a couple of reasons. First, because all students used the app in both personal and academic contexts, there was no ‘learning curve’ associated with the students. The instructors worked together to navigate their own learning of the abilities and functionalities of the app. Additionally, HNU students are not issued university-sponsored email accounts and no single-click option, such as is available in many U.S. universities through class management platform, was available.

2. Student to Teacher Communication

Because WeChat is a multifunctional app and offers both text and image options, we found that submission of essays, digital posters, and exit tickets could be easily facilitated via the app, again reducing the amount of paper/supplies used for their work. Documents in Word, PDF,

and other common programs could be submitted and verified quickly, allowing the instructors to assess students' work and offer feedback as assignments were received. Because the digital format left a footprint, students could confirm submission of assignments, including a date and time stamp to which both instructor and student could refer if questions arose regarding submission.

Due to the social nature of learning (Roberts, et al., 2017), we often employed a collaborative learning environment, which is in stark contrast to what we witnessed as the norm in Chinese schools. When students were placed in collaborative working groups, we encouraged them to establish small texting groups that included the instructors or not, depending on the groups' needs. Doing so facilitated collaboration and communication between members of the groups and allowed submission of group assignments in a format that all members could witness and verify.

Finally, we used WeChat to invite questions and comments. Students could ask questions in either the whole group strand, a small group strand, or a direct message depending on the situation. Often, one student would send a question and their peers would nod and mumble appreciation that the question was asked. Students also sent notice of late arrival, absences, and other special circumstances that arose, further facilitating effective two-way communication between faculty and students.

Choral Response

When teaching in a classroom in which the majority of students are English learners, instructors should aim to increase the time students spend actively engaging in English language tasks. One way to increase student talking time is to employ *choral reading and response*, a strategy that asks all students to speak aloud in unison, either by reading from a text or by

repeating correct responses (Ediger, 2011; Thomas, 2013). Research suggests that choral reading encourages fluency and speech rhythm in adults who stutter, indicating a reduction in stress associated with speaking in a group or to an audience (Dechamma & Maruthy, 2018).

Additionally, choral response facilitates repeated reading of a text, which has been shown to improve language fluency (Paige, 2011). By asking students to state a correct answer as a group, teachers reinforce the course content while monitoring for understanding and confusion.

Simultaneously, teachers can help strengthen students' pronunciation of content-specific terms.

1. Choral Reading

This is a fairly straightforward strategy in which all students are given the same text and asked to read in unison. Students are afforded adequate time to practice reading the passage, silently or verbally, and when all are prepared, the teacher gives a signal for the reading to begin. On the first few attempts, the class may not be reading in unison so much as reading the same material at the same time, creating a cacophonous atmosphere in the classroom. Given ample opportunities, however, students will learn appropriate rates and cadences for the passages (Paige, 2011), allowing the teacher to listen for pronunciation errors and correct them as necessary. In our China context, we asked students to read various short passages containing increasingly complex social and academic language.

2. Choral Response

Unlike choral reading, choral response does not have written text to which the students can refer. Instead, they must access the information from memory. This is not to indicate that simple memorization is required. Instead, teachers should pose the questions, allow adequate wait time for all learners to formulate a response, then give a signal for all students to respond at once. For this to be effective, wait time is critical as it allows all students the chance to engage

with the prompt and create their answer. To be successful, students must be taught to refrain from answering until the signal is given by the teacher. This prevents the one or two fastest-thinking students from blurting out the correct responses, which effectively allows their peers to disengage.

Stoffelsma and Charldorp (2020) caution that overuse of choral response or reading, however, can lead to individual students not actively engaging with the content being learned. Instead, they memorize what they are expected to say without committing any knowledge to long-term memory. Their study, conducted in township schools in South Africa, shows that choral reading can be a way for instructors to cover for their students' lack of true learning. Used in the way described in their study, we agree with Stoffelsma and Charldorp's (2020) conclusion that choral response can be used inappropriately by some instructors.

Conclusion

While working in a university setting in China with 39 Chinese speaking preservice teachers, we, the authors, found it necessary to be creative and engaging while guiding our students in acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge, as well as increasing their fluency and skills in use of the English language. Because we were situated in a sheltered classroom, with only English Learners, we were able to build in strategies that scaffolded our students' use of the four modes of language – reading, writing, listening, and speaking – increasing their opportunities to engage in the language while improving their fluency and confidence.

We learned through our experiences how the EL strategies we teach to our English speaking preservice teachers at our home university can work in an applied setting. Specifically we learned that (a) using a variety of strategies builds in interest and engagement; (b) explicitly teaching the strategies to the students helps with implementation; (c) consistently employing

strategies allows students to gain comfort and confidence; and (d) all of this leads to increased success in student acquisition of both English language skills and content knowledge.

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